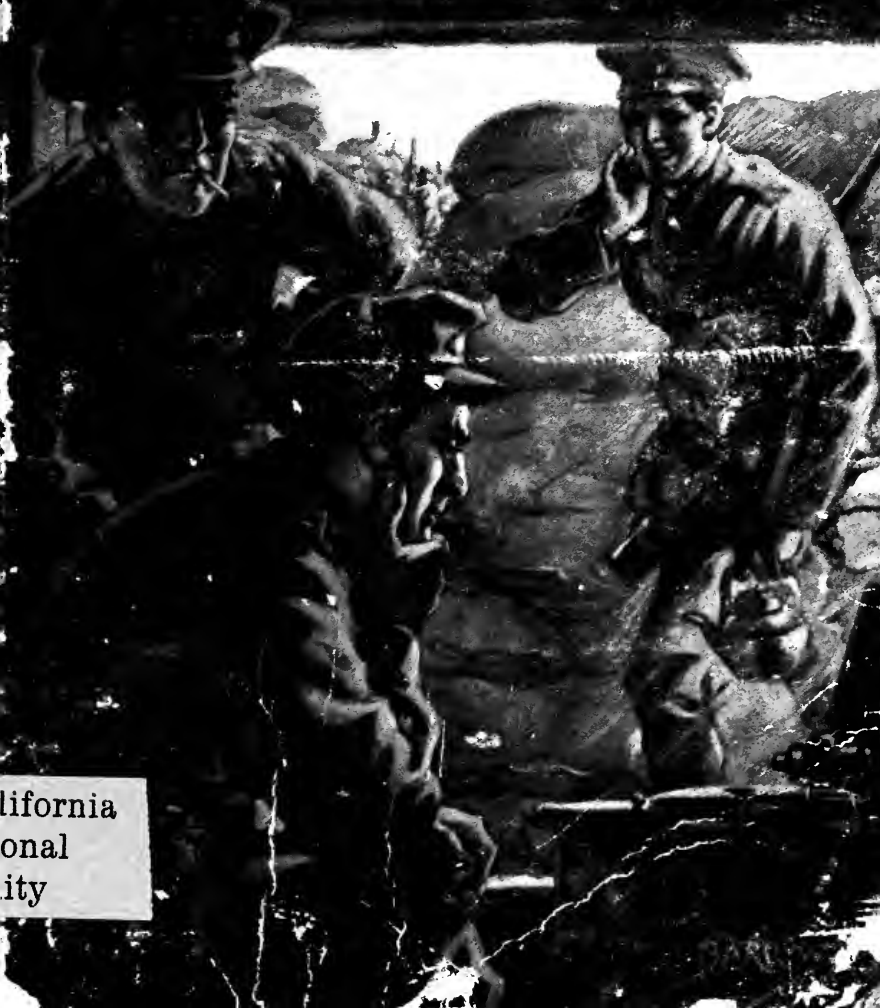


THE SONNET BOOKS

LIFE AMONGST THE SAND BAGS

HUGO MORGAN



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LIFE AMONGST THE SANDBAGS

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**LIFE AMONGST
THE SANDBAGS**
By HUGO MORGAN

THE PADRE. By
"TEMPORARY CHAPLAIN"

HODDER & STOUGHTON, *Publishers*, LONDON

LIFE AMONGST THE SANDBAGS

BY
HUGO MORGAN

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I. Officers' Mess

A LONG stretch of flat country ; straight ahead a forest of regularly set hop-poles ; in the distance to the right more hop-poles and large open fields, with here and there an isolated cottage, or a group of farm buildings ; on the horizon, surmounted by a windmill, a low hill, from the foot of which leads a long symmetrical avenue of trees, marking a main road. To the left a similar view—stretches of plough-land ; small somnolent villages, scattered about at random on these bleak and dreary plains. That is

Officers' Mess

Flanders, as we know it, and in the middle of this comfortless expanse we have taken up our abode in a little wooden hut.

“What’s the time, some one?” asks Greg, looking lazily at the other occupants of the hut. “I’m getting hungry.”

Hunter, known to us as Kelly, is staring vacantly at the canvas ceiling at the moment, devising what he may put in a letter, and is too absorbed to answer; and as Russell is busy fixing a new needle into the gramophone, and I am engrossed in following up the tracks of an escaped criminal with some *Strand Magazine* detective, no reply is forthcoming.

Gregson,—Greg as we call him,—with

Officers' Mess

less respect, perhaps, than befits a company commander, apparently expects no answer, but looks at his own watch and comes to the conclusion that it is time for tea. The motion is put to the house and carried unanimously.

Greg puts his head out of the door and shouts out " Jackson! " at the top of his voice repeatedly, till a faint " 's-Sir " is heard in the distance from the servants' tent. Before long tea appears.

I have met cheerful people, but none so jovial as Greg. He is a great asset to our mess, especially when time drags. The outbreak of the war found him a chartered accountant in a provincial town, previous military career limited to three years in a junior O.T.C., and as yet a celibate. Kelly, on the other

Officers' Mess

hand, though junior subaltern, had been married five years, and as Greg puts it, "took a commission when he thought the war was nearly over, and was gazetted second lieutenant, there being no thirds." Like most of us, he is a civilian by nature, and also an expert at golf. Be careful to pronounce it "goff" in his presence. I forgot once.

We have a real soldier in Russell, the genuine article; not that we are not genuine, but he was a regular before the war, and as he has already seen years of service in India we regard him rather as an encyclopædia on matters military. We have had a marvellous training of course, all done in a year. To ceremonial parade, *viâ* platoon and company drill, field schemes, musketry and night opera-

Officers' Mess

tions,—and then the crossing of the Channel and active service. I shall never forget that voyage across, when we left England a fresh, enthusiastic, and complete unit. That same boatload will not return.

I had been spending balmy days at Cambridge—days when we went to lectures and theatres, read books and rowed, and made friends, until the aggressive spirit of the Hun emptied the Universities of their contents, and distributed us in khaki to different parts of the globe. The experience I had gained in a junior O.T.C. at school I found invaluable, though I remember well how we used to dislike the drills, and tedious parades, and how the great feature of some of the field-days was the train journey.

Officers' Mess

"Tea's in," says Greg.

Kelly stops scrutinising the ceiling, and Russell, when the last strains of "Un Peu d'Amour" have resolved into a scratch, comes and perches himself on a box near the table. We have two beds up against the side of the hut, knocked together very flimsily and always threatening to collapse. They are used as settees by day and beds by night.

The wind blows in through a gap in the tarred felt which covers the hut, and is the only protection we have against the elements. There are air-tight huts, water-tight huts and huts that are light-tight. But this one has none of those attributes.

It consists only of a framework of wood, over which has been nailed some canvas,

Officers' Mess

and over that some tarred felt. In places even this is lacking and there is only a bit of thin canvas between us and the sky.

The sides flap continuously, and as a second brew of tea appears at the door a huge gust rushes in, causing great havoc, and the door, swinging back violently, breaks off its hinges and has to be propped up. Everything points to a squally night.

“A funny life this,” says Greg, cleaning his knife on a piece of bread, a habit which we have acquired in Belgium. “Look at old Kelly, dreaming of bunkers and mashie-niblicks. What happens, Kelly, if you drive into a cow’s ear? I’ve often done it on our links at home. Are you allowed to pick-out and count

Officers' Mess

one? Or do you lose the hole? Won't answer, you see. Too grand for me, these married men, you know."

"Do we go up to the line to-morrow, Greg?" says Kelly, suddenly emerging from his mashie dreams.

"Yes."

"Well, let's take a decent lot of candles this time. Don't you remember we ran out last time and had to sit in the dark? Cut me a piece of bread, Golly" (a name I had acquired, owing to a luxurious growth of black hair). "Not so thick as that; we aren't in a workhouse. It's going to be draughty to-night. I wonder who made this hut. I should think—— Come in. Come in."

The door is lifted bodily on one side and a head appears.

Officers' Mess

"Is Captain Gregson in?"

"Yes."

"A message for you, sir."

"Right; thanks."

*"You will inspect gas-helmets
before moving up to the trenches to-
morrow aaa*

"From

"ADJUTANT."

"Oh; right. All right. There's no answer, thanks. Oh, you want it signed, do you?"

The head is withdrawn, and the door replaced. "Let's have a cigarette," says Greg, seizing my case, "I've run out. What's Golly doing?—making out lists as usual, I suppose. You have complete lists, haven't you, of the men deficient

Officers' Mess

of one button of their gas helmet satchel, and another showing the names in alphabetical order with beautiful shaded block capitals at the top? ”

“ No,” breaks in Kelly, “ that’s where you are wrong; he has made it out according to their age, and a duplicate copy for reference after the war.”

“ What’s that? ” demands Russell, helping himself to one of my cigarettes and tapping it on the back of his hand. “ What’s that you said about after the war? ”

“ Well, perhaps not quite as long as that. I ought to have said ‘ in ten years’ time.’ Optimists, you know, say the first five years of the war will be the worst.”

Officers' Mess

"Kelly trying to palm off an old joke as his own," I remark.

"All right," says Kelly, "you needn't be nasty about it," as he winds the gramophone. "What shall I put on? Selections from *Patience*. That'll do. 'Twenty love-sick maidens we—e.'"

"Shut up, Kelly; let's hear the record," Later in the evening, after much gramophone winding and a little letter-writing, we turn in to make the most of the last night in camp.

About two in the morning I am roused by a sudden squall, and hear the chilly noise of drip! drip! drip! drip! drip! on the floor. The sides of the hut are flapping, the door has fallen over outwards and the wind is whistling round the table and whirling round the room,

Officers' Mess

through the walls, into my sleeping bag and out. Papers are being swept about and the noise almost drowns the snores of Kelly in the next bed. I turn over and try to disappear completely into my sleeping bag, but fresh gusts blow in through the door, the whole hut sways, the tarred felt on the roof is ripped off, and the rain finds its way to a hole in the canvas and streams through on to the floor. Kelly sleeps on, unperturbed, but Nemesis is swift. He turns over in his flimsy bed, and with a metallic thud the biscuit tins which support it collapse on to the floor and he is precipitated, much to my joy, with greater haste than dignity, into the sea that has been formed on the floor.

Dawn at last appears and the wind

Officers' Mess

dies down. Throughout the morning the pioneers are busy on the roof of our hut, sawing, screwing, patching and hammering.

To-night we move up to the line.

II. Relieving

“**W**E move off at 6.15 to-night,” says Greg to the Sergeant-Major; “the company had better parade at six o’clock on the road. I shall come round and inspect huts at five, so see they are cleaned up. There’s nothing else.”

“Yes, sir,” says the Sergeant-Major, and making a note of it he withdraws with a click of the heels and a salute.

“And that’s that, as George Robey would say,” mutters Greg half to himself and half to us.

We parade at six o’clock as ordained, after adjusting our packs. I sympathise

Relieving

now with Christian on his pilgrimage with such a load on his back. I am inclined to think that Bunyan should be held responsible for the idea of making a man into a beast of burden. The platoon sergeants, like sheep-dogs, are nosing in and out of the huts collecting and rounding up their lambs, while the Sergeant-Major, taking full advantage of his powerful lungs, exhorts, persuades, urges and threatens the whole assembly, until finally the company is formed up two deep.

The wind blew itself out last night. To-night it is fine, though very dark. The Belgian roads, as all infantrymen know, have not been laid for the benefit of the foot-slogger, and the ridge of slippery *pavé* in the centre of the road

Relieving

is a doubtful joy. We find that transport, whether motor or horse, has little respect for us. Motor lorries prefer letting us plough our way through the soupy mud at the side of the road, to getting stuck in it themselves, and mule-drawn limbers seem to realise that the *pavé* was laid for their benefit and not for ours.

And so, as we plod slowly along, every now and then word is passed up, "Keep to the right," and with a sigh we slip over the edge of the cobbles, down—down into the squelchy mixture of earth and water which constitutes the now-famous Flanders mud. It is a weird procession that moves along in file. Some are wearing fur coats, some have leather waistcoats under their tunics and odd-

Relieving

looking parcels tied on to their bulging packs, while the Bombers wear steel helmets. For about an hour we trudge along a bye-road, till we reach a ruined village. Half of it has been laid low by shell fire, and the other half, strange to say, has scarcely been touched. In this part civilians are still living. The poor will always cling to their Lares and Penates as long as they possibly can, even at the risk of their own lives.

There is still standing an *estaminet*, where a dreadful mixture of Belgian beer and English stout is sold, a patriotic but unpleasant drink, and a small baker's shop, where it is possible to buy besides bread, oranges, apples and a few groceries, Quaker Oats, tinned fruit and sardines.

Relieving

Wherever there is a shop in the war-stricken area, there you may be sure of finding some tinned peaches and a packet of Quaker Oats, even if there are only two articles in stock. We do not halt in the village, as it is an unhealthy spot, but lead on past the church, the roof of which and three sides of the tower have been blown in. The interior is merely a heap of rubble, twisted iron and decapitated and dismembered images.

On we go. "Keep to the right," and three motor ambulances rush past up towards the line, at a pace far beyond all English road regulations.

As soon as we have passed out of the village and left the demolished station half a mile behind, the sweet words, "Halt and fall out on the right," come

Relieving

down, everybody sits down on the side of the road, packs are unhitched and cigarettes lit. I leave my pack at the side of the road and walk up to the head of the column to find Greg. He is sitting on his pack discussing the Hippodrome revue with Kelly, who is puffing at a pipe. "Hullo, Golly, how are you feeling?" says he, not that he wants to know really, but just by way of passing the time of day. So I say, "How's yourself," and the conversation drifts again to the subject of Harry Tate and Shirley Kellogg.

"We must move," says Greg after ten minutes and just as I had got started on an Abdulla produced by Kelly. "Fall in!" On go the packs again and are adjusted with grunts and groans; away

Relieving

goes the soothing Abdulla. "Advance," shouts Greg. So we do.

The road is a wide main road, all *pavé*, and skirted with tall skimpy trees. Here and there we pass a shattered house, or some dilapidated *estaminet*, where the disfigured letters of "Herberg den Waagen" are replaced by a small board, bearing the words "Head-quarters Signal Company," which is also shown by a mass of wires leading through one of the windows on the ground floor, and a motor bicycle standing outside. Far in the distance, about six miles away, the flicker of Verey lights appears at intervals, while every now and then we hear the dull thud of rifles and the dud dud dud dud dud of machine guns. On and on; our packs grow

Relieving

heavier and heavier, till we arrive at a large red-brick building, which stands by itself. Before the war it must have been a fine place; even now it has not lost all the beauty of its architecture, though the roof has gone in parts, and the left wing has been knocked about. Into this building we lead. Through echoing corridors we pass, across a small court into another part of the building. We have an hour's halt, exchange our ankle-boots for thigh gum boots, which are cold and clammy, and once more continue on our pilgrimage.

Our road lies through what was once an inhabited place. Not a house is left untouched. In some of them the bottom story has been cut clean away, but the top remains standing pivoted

Relieving

on one wall, apparently contrary to all the laws of gravity. In others the top story has been blown in, and the furniture is still there, just as it was left. In some cases the coats of the late tenants are still hanging on the wall.

As we leave the other end of the street, a mysterious voice comes out of the darkness, "Who are you?" and rouses every one from his dreams of armchairs and fires. "Grunt, grunt," says each platoon commander. "Pass, friend!" says the mysterious voice, and on we go. Here the road is broken with shell holes, but by the twinkle of the Verey lights we can see where they are, and sometimes when a light goes up find ourselves on the brink of an abyss. By

Relieving

this time we have separated out and trek on by platoons at about a hundred yards' interval. The isolated cottages, so weak that they can hardly stand, have suffered badly from the exploded wrath of the Hun, and are too dilapidated for use, except one, which has of necessity been converted into a first dressing station. A little way past that and we arrive in the area of stray bullets. Ph—s—s—s plonk! into a tree or the road. Fortunately there is no shelling to-night. Ph—s—s—s—s plonk. Somebody ducks his head after the bullet has gone.

The trees at the side look like telegraph posts, here and there lying across the road and concealing some large cavern. Bits of limbers, wheels and shafts

Relieving

remain as souvenirs of shelling that has been.

At last we reach a point on the road, where we have to climb down into the communication trench. The first six men are already in the trench, others are clambering down with difficulty and the remainder are still on the road, when a Verey light shoots up. Each one of us stands as motionless as a statue and a carrying party on the road halts, as if by word of command. Luck is against us this time.

Tutt! tutt! tutt! tutt! tutt! phiss! phiss! phiss! They have a machine-gun laid on this spot and are traversing the road. Down! Every one goes flat where he is, be there mud, holes or water. Down goes the carrying party,

Relieving

timber, corrugated iron, sandbags and all. The bullets strike sparks on the broken *pavé* just ahead of us.

A pause. Then a scramble to get into the communication trench. Phiss! phiss! phiss! phiss! Down again. This time the bullets seem to be going high. During the next pause the remainder secure the kindly shelter of the trench. As we move on up, word is passed along "Stretcher-bearers wanted on the road."

The last bit of the journey is slow. We plough through trenches impossible to drain, slip up on tippy trench boards or get jammed under some piece of overhead cover. In places the weight of the sodden earth has defied the energy of the R.E. and the sides have collapsed in-

Relieving

wards. Through communicating trenches, support trenches, more communicating trenches to the firing line. The Company Commanders confer, the Platoon Officers confer, the Sergeant-Majors do the same, the sentries explain their duties to the relieving sentries and then move out.

Greg telephones down to Headquarters "Relief Completed," and here we are holding a small bit of the Western Front.

III. Amongst the Sandbags

“**D**ID you bring up those pictures?” asks Greg, sipping at some tepid tea.

“Some of them,” I answer. “Three Kirchners and that one you took out of *The Sketch*. I’ll stick them up soon.”

We are sitting in a dug-out. Time 3 a.m. and very cold. The dug-outs in this bit of line are not spacious. Greg and I share Company Headquarters. It is possible to sit up, though standing is out of the question.

The walls of the dug-out are made of sandbags, through which water oozes.

Amongst the Sandbags

The roof consists of two bits of corrugated iron, covered with a thin layer of earth, which we persuade ourselves is shell-proof, and over the door hangs an old waterproof sheet. On the floor of the dug-out is a trench board, the primary object of which is to keep our feet out of water; but this is of no avail, as the water, soaking in through the sandbag walls, gradually rises and has to be baled out with a tea-cup about every two hours. The officers' servants have a dug-out hard by, where they light a brazier and make tea.

I will just take you, whoever you may be, round the bit of trench we are in, if you will come out of the dug-out with me. Then you can see a bit of life amongst the sandbags.

Amongst the Sandbags

Stoop down as you come out, or you will catch your head on that nail. It's raining a bit. Ugh! beastly cold too. Still, I must visit the sentries, so you might as well come along. No, we can't get rid of this mud, because it is impossible to drain here. In this flat country the only drainage possible is from one brigade area into another. Walk carefully, as there are holes under the water, which you can't see.

That bit of parapet got blown in by a crump the day before yesterday; no one near at the time fortunately. Oh, "crump" is only another name for a high-explosive shell. Some people call them "Jack Johnsons." Anything to report, sentry? Right! I will put up a light, so keep a good look-out, and

Amongst the Sandbags

see if you can spot anything. It'll go up in about three minutes. I am going to warn the other sentries first. Listen! Yes, sounds like some one driving in stakes. Come on. Sentry, keep a look-out when this light goes up, the sentry on your left thinks he hears a working-party. Are you ready? Have a good look. Chonk!! Fss! Can't see anything. Funny that. Must be a mistake. It sounded quite close. Let me know, when I come back, sentry, if you hear any more. We'll move on a bit. Be careful here as there are some loose trench boards under the mud. Hold up. Have you hurt yourself? Got the mud all up your sleeve; yes, beastly, isn't it? Come on, we must get on. Keep low here, as they have got a rifle trained

Amongst the Sandbags

on this broken-down piece of parapet. I lost my best corporal there the other day: he got it through the head. There you are, you see. A good thing we were low. He hits that same sandbag in the parados every time.

That's the stretcher-bearers' dug-out there, where you hear some one chopping up firewood. Of course that's the noise the sentry heard. Working party indeed! Yet I must say I thought so too. Ah! this is better, they have put some decent trench boards down here. The R.E. were doing this last time we were in. Strange place to have a grave, on the parados, but then this ground has changed hands nine times they say, and is an awful shambles. You see that trench leading—ugh! a deep hole. I

Amongst the Sandbags

didn't see it. Go slowly. The mud got in over the top of my gum-boot then.

Anything to report, sentry? Right. A bit damp to-night on that fire-step, isn't it? When do you come off? Four o'clock? I shall be bringing rum ration round about half-past four. Give me your rifle. I have a friend with me, who would like to have a shot. Here you are. Yes, it's loaded. Wait till I put a light up, then you will see a low black line about a hundred yards away, where their parapet is. Take a shot at that. Chonk!! Fss!—Crack! I wonder if you accounted for a Hun. We must now go on, as there is a bombing post to visit, and some more sentries. This way, only don't make any noise. This is an old trench here that runs

Amongst the Sandbags

between our lines and theirs. Probably our fire trench was once theirs, you see, and this was one of their communication trenches. It's all blown in now, so we have a listening post down it to prevent any one creeping up at night. It's not a nice job, because they can't talk. Two hours on and four off, same as the sentries. Talk in a whisper here. Just stay there, while I go to visit the post. All correct. Very quiet night. They thought they heard some one driving in stakes, but found out afterwards the noise came from our own trench. No, not that way. Round to the left here, for the rest of our sentries. Let's see, what's the time—about four? We "stand to" at five, so I shan't issue the rum till then.

Amongst the Sandbags

That sentry I was just talking to is a jolly good chap in the trenches, though an awful nuisance out. He was a poacher before the war, and let out of gaol to enlist, so you can see what sort of a chap he is. Apparently he doesn't know what fear is, and will I am afraid get sniped one day by putting his head over the parapet in daytime. He can tell some yarns, about moonlight scrapes with game-keepers. Still he is a useful man to have about, so long as he can be kept away from the estaminets. This is the right of our section ; " A " Company starts here, so we will be getting back. It will be just about time to " stand to," by the time we get back to the dug-out. Have you had enough yet, because we have to " stand to " at dawn, for an

Amongst the Sandbags

hour—every one in the trench. Keep low here again. You probably remember that spot. Sentry, that hammering came from our own trenches. Is that the N.C.O. on duty? Oh, Sergeant Baker, just pass down “Stand to” and see every one is turned out of the dug-outs. I’ll go and wake Greg.

IV. Crumps

GREG does not like being wakened up for "Stand to." Who does? However, it has got to be done, so I stick my head in round the side of the dripping waterproof sheet.

"You like lemonade," Greg is saying in a husky voice, "lemonade, Molly, lemonade lem—ade——" and his voice disappears into a series of grunts.

He is fast asleep, his head on a dirty pack, one foot dangling in the water, which has risen considerably, the other propped up on some ammunition boxes.

Crumps

Poor chap. He is far away in his native land. Perhaps he is floating lazily on a river on a hot still evening with Molly reclining at one end of a luxurious punt, listening to the strains of a gramophone coming from an equally well-cushioned punt round a bend in the river ; or perhaps he has just finished the supper dance on a smooth-floored ball-room and is partaking of light and mild refreshment.

However, as I said before, it has got to be done. Perhaps the orchestra has just struck up the "Eternal Waltz" and he is glancing through his programme when I shout "Wake up, Greg. Stand to."

"What—d'y—s'."

"Wake up. Stand to."

Crumps

Greg gradually sits up. Ugh ! only a dug-out after all.

“ Oh, is that you, Golly ? Stand to ? Righto. You might issue out the rum. I’ll just see the Sergeant-Major about last night’s ration party. I can’t think why there wasn’t a mail. I was expecting a letter. Hasn’t the rain stopped yet ? ”

So Greg crawls out of his burrow into the damp chill air of a dismal dawn, and wades in search of the Sergeant-Major. Rum is issued, and as soon as it is light enough for the sentries to see through periscopes, we “ stand down,” which is the time for breakfast.

Those who have dwelt amongst sand-bags know well the breakfast hour. The Hun, too, has a breakfast hour and

Crumps

both sides apparently have an interval for the lighting of braziers and a little breakfast. Redhead, my servant, comes to the dug-out with a piece of tepid bacon and some bread, and later with some tea, and we eat. I am very glad to find that Greg has discovered the mail. It had only been mislaid.

“ Any letters for me, Greg ? ” I ask, seeing him deep in one himself.

“ No, nothing.”

“ Nothing at all ? ” I insist. “ That’s funny ; nobody lufs me. What were you dreaming about, Greg, just before ‘ stand to ’ ? ”

“ Don’t talk so much,” says Greg, chewing at a bit of bacon, “ I’m reading a letter.”

At that moment Sergeant Baker puts

Crumps

his head in through the door. "Three letters for you, sir. Got mixed up with the platoon letters."

"Ha! ha!" says I. "One from home, the other from a chap I knew at Cambridge and—that's what I wanted. I'll read that first."

Afterwards I curl up in a corner and try to doze. Whiz—z—z—z—z crumpsh! No peace for the wicked. The Hun is starting his morning hate.

Whiz—z—z—z—z crumpsh!! That was too near to be comfortable, because lumps of mud come down and thud on the roof of the dug-out. Fz-bang! Fz-bang! They are sending over "whizz-bangs"—horrible things, which shriek over the top of the parapet and explode before one has had time to think about

Crumps

them. Crumps, on the other hand, behave in a more gentlemanly manner, and give one good warning of their approach. Boom! says the gun in the distance; then there is a whistling and sizzling in the air, which grows louder and louder, nearer and nearer, climbs up as though to the top of a long slope, and then like the stone of Sisyphus rushes down the other side, where we poor helpless mites are grouped together, and with a rasping, crushing screech it loses control of itself and lands—Crumpsh! Distance lends enchantment.

This morning the Hun hates us more than usual, and the crumps sing and shriek and burst at irregular but short intervals.

Whiz—z—z—z crumpsh! The dug-

Crumps

out shudders. I must get out into the trench and see where they are going. The best place to be in is between a piece of thick parapet and thick parados.

Whiz—z— Here it comes. Up, up, down, down—z—z crumpsh ! Just short of the trench.

“ By Jove, I thought that had us,” said the sentry. “ It was coming straight at us. Here’s another. Keep down.”

Whiz—z—z—z dud.

“ Dud,” says every one, with a sigh of satisfaction, as it fails to explode. “ They may send over as many ‘ duds ’ as they like. Look out ! ” Crumpsh ! “ Mind the bits.” •Mud, sandbags, wood, iron come down like rain.

Some one appears round the traverse. “ Pass the word up for the stretcher-

Crumps

bearers, mate," he shouts to one of the men.

"Who's hit?" I ask.

"Lance-Corporal Smith, sir. Got thrown across the trench, sir. A whizz-bang came into—look out, keep down"—Crumpsh!—"A w-whizzbang,s-sir. Slight wound in leg, but there's no hope for Cuthbert, sir. He got it in the head."

I go along the trench with him and find the parapet has been blown in at one spot. Lance-Corporal Smith is more dazed than damaged and is quickly reviving. Meanwhile Greg has telephoned back for retaliation.

At last. What a soothing sound! The sharp Ponk! of one of our own guns, a shell fizzing through the air and then a dull Crumpsh! in the Hun trenches, then

Crumps

another and another. That's better. To be shelled is like being tied in a chair while some one hammers at you. You are helpless, and all you can do is to call on some one else, the artillery, to hit back.

The Hun is getting a good iron ration now and before long he knocks off. Not good enough, no doubt, especially as he is getting five in return for one. And thus the morning hate dwindles down. I turn in for a snooze.



V. Officers' Servants

SOME days in the trenches are noisy, some are quiet, but the average day consists of a mild morning hate on the part of the Hun artillery, plenty of snipers and an occasional trench mortar. Speaking of trench mortars reminds me of other things. You know how quickly and queerly a train of thought runs.

Trench mortars ; yes, we have some. Rotten job to be a trench mortar officer—lives by himself and is disliked by every one, as being the centre of attraction for German shells. He leads a

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hermit's life in a dug-out, except that he has his servant to look after him. He comes out to fire a round or two, and then disappears again into the ground. Our trench mortar fellow lost his servant the night before last, getting into the communication trench off the road. Talking about servants, they are better off than the sentries on the fire-step. A funny lot are officers' servants. All sorts and conditions, and yet they quite make a clique of their own.

Now on the other side of this unclean ditch, which we call the firing line, is the servants' dug-out, whence, as I have said before, emanates tepid tea, sticky ration bacon and other dainties. Within are four servants, who sit round a

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brazier of fuming coke and sleep and talk, eat and sleep. Nearest the door sits Jackson, who appertains to Greg, and revels in the name of Joe amongst his most intimate friends.

In spite of a somewhat democratic name he had lived in high circles previous to the war, and had been footman for several years at an old country house. He breathes secrets of high life, and pours forth unknown scandals of the upper ten to a small but attentive audience. He talks of powdered hair, and coats of many colours, of titled guests, of the servants' hall and its associations, while Redhead, commonly known as Alf, listens and prods the brazier with an old bayonet. Redhead is my valet, who, though capable as

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such, can boast of no previous service in the same capacity. Two years ago instead of sitting by a brazier with a bayonet in his hand, he could have been found wheeling luggage on a hand-truck along the platform of a remote midland railway station. I can picture him, just before the afternoon train was due. Behind him, perhaps, a rotund farmer or fussy market-woman waiting to see the precious box in the van. Then as the train crawled away again, he would no doubt return to the station-master's sanctum and discuss the weather, the crops, and last week's cattle show.

Nor had this been his sole occupation. Oh no. He had fed a threshing machine, had worked in the fields and been a drawer of bricks at a brickyard. What

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a thing it must be to have such a large scope! What is more, he can recall long talks in "The Red Lion" over a pint of ale, discussions on politics, at which apparently he did not shine.

"Politics?" he says. "No, I ain't no man for politics, I ain't. What I says is let them foight it out amongst t' selves." Yes, he can tell Joe a thin two about harvesting and haymaking.

On the other side of the brazier Dull, also living under a monosyllal name, *i.e.*, George. His surname rather suited to his wits, but he looks after his temporary master to the best of his ability, and let us hope will do so for three years or the duration of the war (which some think might have been worded "for three years or twenty"), as

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the case may be. Two years ago he was scribbling figures in a ledger, adding up columns, balancing, etc., but, having come to the conclusion that the pen is not mightier than the sword, he is now at this moment propped up against damp sandbags with a piece of corrugated iron on his head and lurking in the mud of the trench. What days those were when he played for The Punters, especially that Saturday afternoon when he kicked the ball up on his own from half-back, dodged in and out of the opposing side and finally swung it neatly in through the top left-hand corner. Even Alf listens thrilled and forgets the threshing machine during George's exciting story. George, trying to explain a marvellous kick with illustrations, all but upsets the "billy-

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can" of water, which has just lost the chill. "I should like to have seen old George in those days, how do you think, Alf?" says Barker.

Barker has been a soldier all his life, and being in a reserve battalion volunteered for service, and enjoys life thoroughly. Enjoys every bit of it. Not that he revels in the mud, or the cold or the wet, but he enjoys open-air life, wakes up whistling, goes to sleep singing. Yes, we are a weird assortment, a motley mixture, we temporary soldiers. Here in one short bit of trench, two hundred yards long, here collected in dug-outs or on firesteps, are labourers, clerks, farmers, grooms, footmen, shop assistants, butchers, bakers and candlestick-makers—comrades in arms.



VI. Dug-outs

IF I am one of the fortunates to come through this war, and should at any time want to call to mind sandbag life, I shall find a piece of sacking, steep it in creosote, and hang it over my bed. Then shall I dream of chilly dug-outs, flapping waterproof sheets and dripping corrugated iron.

There are dug-outs and dug-outs. Some are dug out, and some are not. There is the rough dug-out, which has been excavated in the parados, covered over with a sheet of iron, a layer of sand-

Dug-outs

bags inside and out, and that is all. No good. The water soaks in mercilessly, the rain drips in through the corner, and blows in through the front, and eventually the walls collapse.

Greg and I had a palatial dug-out in the last bit of line we held. It had been dug into the ground only two feet, the rest was built up of sandbags and we could stand up in it. It had a fine wooden framework, larger than the regulation R.E. frame. After a nocturnal visit to a ruined house close to the trench, we returned with a bit of a door—the hinged bit—and this was duly fixed up. We had two bunks in the side of the wall, padded and upholstered with unfilled sandbags, where we could sleep undisturbed by every annoyance, except

Dug-outs

of course rats and shells. Round the walls some canvas, stretched over the sandbags, took the place of a wall-paper. A small table, likewise two chairs and a stool, comprised the furniture. Where they came from nobody knows. I can imagine the American tourist visiting the trenches after the war, as he surely will, saying "Some dug-out." That is assuming that it is still there. It may have already been laid flat for all I know.

On the walls of this charming villa we had coloured prints and drawings. Kelly was O.C. pictures in those days and arranged Lawson Wood and the Cowham Children in a way which, according to his pseudo-artistic ideas, formed a colour scheme. We then decided to adopt an oriental style, chiefly

Dug-outs

owing to the fact that Kelly had had some incense sent out to counteract sandbag-odour. So we draped a bit of red cloth over the bunks, Kelly produced a Japanese screen, and with the aid of De Reske Tenor and the joss-sticks we felt quite Eastern.

Here, however, in this bit of line there is hardly a dug-out to be found. Last week we were holding a sector a little farther to the right, in which was an old German dug-out. It had been a magnificent place. There were five slippery mud steps down to it. The dug-out had been almost the size of a room, built with great care. The walls were all planked, the floor planked and the roof made of planks placed edgewise on, covered with deep earth and sand-

Dug-outs

bags. By the time we got there, however, half of it had fallen in, and some of the wooden stays had collapsed, so that only a small part was left for use, and water kept draining in from somewhere, drowning the beauty of the plank floor. Up in one corner stood a heavy bilge pump with which the occupants had to exercise themselves every four hours.

There are great stories about this dug-out, which are handed from occupant to occupant, and embellished as they go—tales of how a German staff was found in the dug-out when we attacked, overcome with gas; how that a woman was buried behind the sandbags of the wall farthest from the door, and in the opposite wall a general. When the woman wept the water came in more

Dug-outs

quickly. This we found usually coincided with rain. The noises made by scuttling rats were put down to the vain efforts of the entombed general to extricate himself.

And so you see all dug-outs are not without their interest. But there is a pervading atmosphere of sordidness about all dug-outs, which it is hard to overcome even with the coloured efforts of Lawson Wood or Kirchner, or cuttings from the *Sketch* and *Tatler*. Still they help. Greg says if he ever sees a sandbag after the war, it will turn his brain. I hope he will, it may turn it back again. We fell out over that.

“ Can’t we get some of the water out ? ”
I said to Greg one evening, “ haven’t we got a pump ? ”

Dug-outs

“Leave the water at present,” he answered, “it doesn’t show, and let’s try and obliterate these sandbag walls with that *Tatler* you had sent you to-day. Do you know,” he went on, tearing pictures out of my paper, “if those people at home could see us here they would realise what a filthy existence it is. It’s a good thing that they can’t in a way, but there are a few people I would like to see in this dug-out for forty-eight hours. Pacifists and those sorts of people, conscientious objectors and so on. It is such a trying way of fighting, this. You never see your enemy. I don’t think I have seen a Hun for three months or more, and I am sure nothing on this world is harder, Golly, than to sit still and be shelled.

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That dreadful feeling when it is coming at you. Is it going over? No, it's going short, no it's not, yes it is, no—then a colossal upheaval just the other side of the parapet. It is a strain on the best nerves after a time."

"There," he said, "those look all right," as he finished a row of small pictures. "What's the time, Golly? Half-past four, is it? Think of them at home now. I can see them at tea. Can't you imagine the beautiful white tablecloth, Golly, shining china cups, all beautifully neat, little cakes, buttered scones, flowers on the middle of the table, and here are we, looking like a couple of escaped burglars, with bristly beards, dirty hands and living amid rotting sandbags. It's a funny life."

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“ M’lord,” says I, “ the tea is served. Will your lordship use this dented aluminium cup, or, forsooth, the enamel basin ? ”



VII. A Working Party

A FEW days ago we were floundering into this trench, relieving, now some one else is doing the same. As before, the Company Commanders confer, the Platoon Officers confer, the Sergeant-Majors do the same, the sentries explain their duties to the relieving sentries, and then we move out.

Down communication trenches, along wobbly trench boards, into hidden holes, through the support line, more communication trenches, then out up on to the road at the spot where we expect to hear the Tutt tutt tutt tutt tutt of

A Working Party

the machine-gun, down the road, halting as each light goes up, round craters, halting again, over trees and loose branches, and on down the broken *pavé*. On through the land of stray bullets, and shell-marked cross-roads where the transport "dumps" rations, and so back, with intermittent halts, by the way we came.

By midnight we have reached our half-way house, where we have an hour's rest, drink soup and *thé-au-rhum*, reclaim our ankle-boots, hand over the gum-boots, and quickly revive.

By 1 a.m. we have fallen in again outside and are soon trekking on down the endless *pavé* towards the rest camp. Two hours more, yes, two solid hours, and the lights of the camp appear quite

A Working Party

close. Before long we are picking our way along the trench-board paths of the camp to the huts. "Any huts for to-night" is the order; "sort out in the morning." It is 3 a.m. before we turn in. O the joy of a peaceful night, without having to stand on a fire-step or patrol through mud!

When we wake up next morning we find it is about eleven o'clock, and an anti-aircraft gun is "poofing" away in a field not far off. With the aid of soap, sponge and water we spend a busy half-hour or so removing the mud of four days from ourselves, and then we begin to feel more like civilised beings. Greg is always lazy turning out of his sleeping bag the morning after being relieved, so we have time to settle down

A Working Party

to a meal, that combination of breakfast and lunch sometimes combined in the portmanteau word "brunch," before he appears. For the remainder of the day we live a life of ease, possibly taking a party of men to the divisional baths, or holding a short rifle inspection. At 9 p.m. we retire for the night—a long and peaceful one, if the wind is not too strong, nor the roof too leaky.

Do you think, though, that we are left in peace and quiet for days on end? Not a bit. The second night I receive a chit from the Orderly Room :

" You are in charge of a working party of 150 men to report to R.E. officer at 9 p.m. at H 19 d 25 aaa "

A Working Party

“ Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil.” I remember seeing those words in a birthday book against my own particular day. It is the truth, whoever the author may be. But slumber is not to be mine to-night. At six o'clock with a band of a hundred and fifty war-worn heroes, as the newspapers would call them, or “ bloomin' navvies ” as they would call themselves, I set off and meet a large convoy of G.S. wagons waiting for us on the main road. We climb into these luxurious jaunting cars. I myself am perched on a lofty box seat, and at a word from the head of the column the procession jolts forward. From this moment start the movements of every device that is used to make the pleasure-goer sea-sick : such movements

A Working Party

as are combined in the Scenic Railway, the Canadian Toboggan, the Jumping Staircase, the Twisting Tub or the Oscillating Platform. If you like sensations go for a drive on the bottom of a G.S. wagon. You will like sensations no longer.

After two hours of this delightful drive through the country, we arrive at the R.E. dump and disembark, and while I go in search of the R.E. officer the senior N.C.O. forms up the men. After a short pause, which gives the men time to pull themselves together and collect their jolted senses, an engineer officer gives instructions and they lead past a pile of shovels, each taking one as he goes.

“To-night we are going to dig in a

A Working Party

cable for the Signal Company," says the R.E. officer, "starting from a point near the old manor house. We hope to dig in a mile and a half of cable to-night as we have got a large working party, a hundred and fifty from four regiments. You might tell your men that it is most important that the trench they dig should be properly covered up when they fill in, so that Hun aeroplanes will not notice it to-morrow morning. Our artillery has instructions not to fire, as the party is so big, so it promises to be a very quiet night, and there's a decent moon, so we ought to get on all right. Trench for the wire to be three foot deep. Remember that. They can make it as narrow as they like. I should advise about a foot and a half. Right, will you

A Working Party

move your men off? I will meet you there."

We move off and trek along winding roads for nearly three miles, till we come to the spot where we are to start digging. The first man gets to work, the next is stationed at about four yards' interval and so on. One of the sappers counts them out and the line of men goes on across the first field to a hedge and through it. I look back and see the men all standing ready to start work, looking like a row of short telegraph poles in the moonlight. Now I am not a pessimist, but nevertheless I always expect rain on a working party. To-night, however, τὸ ἐλλιπὲς τῆς γνώμης,—there is a falling short of my expectations. I walk on with the sapper who is directing

A Working Party

the long line of men to fixed points where markers are standing with flash lamps to show the direction chosen. The hundred and fifty men when extended to four yards stretch nearly half a mile. At one spot the line has to cross a *pavé* road, so more men have to work there, to take it up with picks. Our line comes to an end in the middle of a field of long grass and from there another regiment carries on.

I stay and supervise the cutting of the road for a bit, then wander down towards the starting point. The digging itself takes no time. Some of the men have finished in half an hour's time ; our old acquaintance the poacher, whom we last met on a fire-step, finishes his bit in about ten minutes, with as much zeal

A Working Party

as though he were digging out rabbits, and is helping his next-door neighbour by the time I come along. Three cables have to be laid, which is a slower job. The sappers pass us with a large revolving drum, which is wheeled along, letting out the cable as they go into the narrow trench.

As I stand looking at the Verey lights going up from the trenches about a mile away, and listening to the "Pink! pink!" of the rifles, I hear the tinkle of a piano coming out of a little copse two fields away. Some one is playing a familiar ragtime. It seems strangely out of place here in a land that was, but no longer is. Probably the artillery are making the best of their night off. As soon as the cables have been laid in goes

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the earth, the turf is replaced, and we move off back to the R.E. dump, but it is 1 a.m. before we get there and 3 a.m. before we have finished with the jolts of the G.S. Wagons. "I, for one, shall not hurry up in the morning," I think, as we find our way into the sleeping rest camp.



VIII. Eight Days' Leave

I WAKE up at eleven o'clock the next morning. Greg is not in, but at C.O.'s orders at the Orderly Room. Slowly I crawl out of my sleeping bag and call for my servant to bring me the necessary washing materials. Greg comes in after a few minutes.

“Hullo, Golly, old man!” he says, “did you have a nice working party last night? There’s a message on the table there for you from the Orderly Room.”

“What? A message? Surely not

Eight Days' Leave

another working party to-night. Whatever is this all about?

“ You are for leave from March 10th to 18th. Warrant enclosed. You can leave to-night. Leave train departs 4.50 a.m. aaa ”

“ Sal-volatile, Greg. Quick. Water anything, I'm fainting. Look here.”

“ You are for leave——”

“ Look at that, Greg, my boy. Leave to-night too. Back to old England, Greg. Back to the land, old son. Think of that. By Jove, isn't it great to be alive. You know I shall be in old

Eight Days' Leave

England, merrie England, to-morrow evening."

O memorable day! I spend the rest of the morning cleaning up, selecting clothes, and collecting in my pack a weird assortment of souvenirs, about which many yarns can be spun. At six o'clock I leave Greg writing a letter at the rickety old table and start on the road to the railhead town. What delightful moments! Far away up by the line I can hear the booming of the artillery, and as I walk along the road the transport rattles past. Soon that will be left far behind and I shall see the green fields of the garden of England.

A motor lorry comes thundering down the road, so I hail the driver and get

Eight Days' Leave

into that, and he takes me the rest of the way into the town. There I search out our divisional baths, and procure a bed and the guarantee of being wakened at three next morning.

“Three o'clock, sir,” says a voice. There is no need to say it twice. At five minutes past three I am having a light breakfast, and by four o'clock I am seated in a long train, waiting to start. There are two other officers, one a *padré*, the other a doctor, in the same carriage. We have all nearly dropped off to sleep when the train starts off with a jerk, leaving the deserted station to itself. The journey is a slow one and at various points the train crawls almost to a standstill. About ten o'clock in the morning we catch our first glimpse of the sea, and

Eight Days' Leave

by eleven the train is running down the hill into Boulogne.

The next item on the programme is to make for the boat, and a seething mass of smiling officers emerges from the station and spreads to the quay, where the boat is awaiting us. Embarkation is only a matter of time, and it is with no reluctance that we hand over our yellow vouchers and cross the gangway. The boat is filled, the quay is empty, save for a few red-nobbed matelots, we are waiting to move off, when the landing officer comes along and says the port has been closed. What is more, it remains closed till half-past three in the afternoon, and even with the aid of the saloon the time goes but slowly. A siren blows, and we begin to feel interested, which interest

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increases as the boat is loosed from her moorings and we are steaming gaily out of the harbour into the channel of water that now alone separates us from England. We discuss submarines and laugh. We feel sea-sick, but who cares? For there in the hazy distance are the cliffs of the promised land, and six o'clock finds us stepping off the boat and rushing to get on the first Pullman train.

It seems quite strange to see "Way in" painted on a board instead of "Entrée," and to have to pull the blinds down to minimise danger from hostile aircraft. You should see those Pullman porters on the run, carrying packs, valises and travelling bags. Subalterns trip up on generals, but only smile; privates bump into colonels, but nobody minds.

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The whistle blows. The train starts off. There is no crawling up hill here; the well-sprung Pullmans swing round the curves of the line, sweep through dimly-lighted stations, and race us up to Victoria.

At Victoria comes the great dividing of the khaki throng. Some stay in town for the night, some are staying there all the time, while others are going up north to Scotland, or west, or into the Midlands. On the platform are relatives anxiously scrutinising each officer as he passes by. At the gate stands a crowd of the curious to watch us walk out. A guard of the G.R. is there ready to assist the traveller in any way, and his office is by no means a sinecure, for English time-tables are scarce in France.

Eight Days' Leave

I am myself destined for the Midlands, and so have to cross over to King's Cross. There being a dearth of taxis in these days, I have to resort to a "growler," drawn by a by no means overfed horse. But I arrive in time for the train. How strange it is to be in London again and see the darkened street lamps and small will-o'-the-wisp lights of the taxis and shaded shop windows. The night before last I was digging in a cable just behind the firing line. I catch a good train at King's Cross, the eight-forty-five non-stop to Peterborough. Two naval men in the same carriage are very keen to hear something about life amongst sandbags, and as I am feeling a bit talkative, we are slowing down into Peterborough before I realise we are half-way there.

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The train slows down and stops with a jerk, and having regained my equilibrium with my right hand, I lower the window, open the door, and look out on to the platform. There is nobody there I know, of course not; they don't even know I am coming. I bid good-night to my two naval companions and make my way to the telephone office, ring up the old folks at home and, after many telephone splutterings and explanations, I search out the waiting-room to await the car. Now I live in rather a remote country town; and, though there is a railway, there is a very bad train service. Hence no trains leave Peterborough in that direction as late as ten o'clock at night. The waiting-room is a cheerless spot, but what com-

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pared with a dug-out ! Listen. Yes, that is the crackle of the steel studs on the *pavé*—as you were !—the macadam road ; and, in as short a time as it takes to tell, I am embracing half the family and being whisked off home. After half an hour, good going, I am home in the bosom of the family, as they say, answering a thousand questions at once. This morning I could hear the boom of the eighteen-pounders in Belgium, to-night as I lie in bed, the regular tick, tick of a grandfather's clock in the hall is the only sound to be heard, except for the deep chimes of the church clock every quarter of an hour.

Back to old England.

IX. A Day with the Hounds

THE blind moves slightly, letting a small chink of light into the room, and discloses the undulating form of the sleeper, oblivious of everything. The sleeper stirs, turns over and slowly opens his eyes and looks at the chink of light. He then pushes one hand out from under the bedclothes and looks at his wrist watch. "Five a.m. Time for 'stand-to,'" he mutters; "I hope they are enjoying it." He turns over again and, burying himself in the bedclothes, goes to sleep.

A Day with the Hounds

To most people those few days' leave are either a thing of the past or a thing of the future, to a very small minority are they a thing of the present. To me they are now a thing of the past except in memories and dreams. Those eight precious days, each of which scarcely seemed to uphold its reputation of being twenty-four hours in length, were spent in visiting innumerable friends and relations—I did not know I had so many—and other excursions, including one to a tailor. The best day I had was two days after I arrived home. I woke up to find a glorious morning, cloudless sky, brilliant sunshine, though the sun had no heat, and everything looked cheerful. Some kind friend having lent me a chestnut horse, I had in mind to chase the wily fox

A Day with the Hounds

“Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through briar.”

At 11 a.m. with a stupendous effort I perched myself on the top of the aforesaid chestnut and started off for the meet, which was some eight miles away. Out into the remote parts of the country I went, along a lane bordered on each side with a thick-set hedge, intertwined with prickly blackberry bushes. As I passed a small group of farm buildings a dog rushed out of a kennel and barked vociferously, and the fat old farmer standing by turned round to pass a morning greeting. “Gooin’ art with the ’oon’s?” he asked, as I rode by. “They was down agen’ the Cow-pastures, a week come to-day, but they ain’t a-killed nothin’.”

A Day with the Hounds

Leaving the farmer and his dog in the distance I came to a steep rise, where the little-used road was covered with loose stones, but the side with smooth turf. At the top of this rise I gazed down on a splendid panorama. To the left a large wood crowns the top of a low hill, and from the edge of this sweeps a long downward stretch of grass, intersected with hedges and fences. At the foot runs a narrow stream, twisting and turning according to the contours of the ground. On the extreme right of this distant wood is a gap, through which can be seen the unfinished front of an old deserted building, roofless and tenantless, standing there as it was left by the builders in the days of Guy Fawkes. Following round the horizon, the woods

A Day with the Hounds

begin again and more of those long sweeping undulations, dotted here and there with grazing sheep, or haystacks, or an old thatched barn.

The road led on through open fields, and crooked-swinging five-barred gates, on for a mile or two, then up a short steep hill into a wood, where at the summit another view opens out. Four miles away are more woods and, leading down from them, a draughts-board of green fields; and in the valley at the bottom lies the little village, where the hounds will meet, nestling at the foot of these curving slopes, with the sun sparkling on the weathercock that surmounts the small spire of the church.

I was certainly blessed with a glorious day and the meet by the village cross is

A Day with the Hounds

a thing I shall not forget for many months. It forms the most pleasant subject for reverie in the trenches. There was the pink-coated huntsman, looking the same as ever he did, the foot followers and the noisy groups of curious and open-mouthed village children, making loud and critical remarks about everybody; there were the old time-honoured followers, and a few strangers, all ladies, but there were no young eligibles; and lastly, there were the hounds, a mass of curved and wagging tails, a blend of black and tan and yellow and white, moving about unceasingly as if anxious to be off, at times looking at the huntsman with their quiet pathetic faces, as if they were asking "Why wait?"

The assembly moved off, led by the

A Day with the Hounds

hounds and the huntsman, followed by the whips and the few mounted followers. Behind them the bicycles, and behind these the village children pulling along young brothers and shouting in their excitement. Up the road trotted the huntsman, and a few late arrivals joined in. Into the fields we went, and across into a large park, making for a wood on the opposite side. Have you ever seen the pink of the huntsman's coat, and the varicoloured mingling of the hounds with a foreground of rich green grass and stately trees, and the sun casting long winter shadows at midday and setting off the colours? Have you ever heard the thudding of horses' hoofs as a canter breaks into a gallop across the smooth sward, and the huntsman blows

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his horn and takes his hounds to the first covert? It is the most beautiful moving-picture in colour to be seen.

At the first covert the huntsman put in the hounds and we moved away to the far corner while the hounds were drawing, and the sharp note of the huntsman was heard every now and then, as he urged the hounds on. Blank. So we waited for the huntsman to collect his followers, and then turned towards another covert. The hounds were in, working up the wood. Listen! A note, another, a chorus, a harmony. They had found.

We waited anxiously at a corner of the wood, keeping a sharp look-out, while others followed up the hounds through the ridings. A small slim brown fox

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with a thick white-tipped brush slipped away out of the wood down towards the Purlieus. We heard the hounds on the trail. One of them broke covert and nosed about, then a few more, and soon the whole pack was scrambling through the edge of the wood, and racing down the long slope towards the Purlieus, behind them the huntsman taking a fence and clearing it. Whoi! Hollaed away-ay! Then the thrill, the thudding of hoofs, racing and galloping over the turf with the hounds in front, veering now to the left, now to the right.

“Hunting,” said the immortal Jor-rocks, “is the sport of kings, the image of war without its guilt.” The field spreads out. Some refuse a ditch, some refuse a hedge, while others get held

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up at an obstinate gate, but the white-tipped brush chooses its own course. A slight check in the Purlieus, then on we go, on and out into the open at the far end, through the rutted ridings of the Coppice, over grassfields, up hill, down dale, up again as the hounds spread over the crest and are lost to sight, pounding down the side of a ploughed field, on, ever on, as the scent grows hotter. Forrard on! Forrard on! The hounds turn sharp right and race up a hedgerow with fresh bursts of melody into a small plantation, and all of a sudden their exulting cries die down.

Who! Who!—a—oi! came the voice of the huntsman, and a long-drawn-out note on the horn, and there

A Day with the Hounds

and then the white-tipped brush was presented to the only lady present. "That 'a been a good run, an' all," said a heavily built farmer, dismounting from his horse: "Best un I've seen this yare, and they've 'ad many a good 'un, as I knows of."

We moved leisurely back to the next covert, ate sandwiches and talked of the incidents of the run, before putting the hounds in again. At four o'clock the field dispersed, and I turned homewards. Passing a little cottage as soon as I had reached the road, I stopped and acquired a glass of milk, which also entailed a long discussion of the run and the route which the fox usually took, and reminiscences of bygone hunts. As I rode slowly back the sun began to set behind those

A Day with the Hounds

magnificent peaceful woods, which were now silent. The road led through a small picturesque village, where the smoke curled lazily out of the chimneys, and an occasional passer-by would demand "Did they kill?" Far away in the distance came the sound of the huntsman calling his hounds home ; and I can hear now the woods echoing with the soft and distant note of the horn, and can picture the sweeps of pastureland, the little dappled patch racing across it, and the thudding gallop of the horses as they follow on—ever on.

X. War

“ **U** NDO his collar, man, so that he can get more air. Has any one got a water bottle? ”

At that moment a Verey light goes up, disclosing a jagged wound on the top of the corporal's skull. He is breathing laboriously and trying to speak, as he is gradually sinking into the land of eternity. What are the words he is muttering? “ Give——my wife,” says the dying man with a supreme effort—and the movement of his white and blood-stained face ceases ; he lies there lifeless,

War

who five minutes ago was a big healthy man, laughing and joking with his comrades.

As we look at his inanimate figure we think of a little cottage in England, where his wife is giving supper to four happy children and telling them, with smiles on her face, that Father will be coming home on leave in a few weeks' time. Little does she dream of the cold still figure, laid out on the fire-step and the group of comrades sighing as they turn away. The stretcher-bearers, grown accustomed to their task, reverently fold the arms across in front, lift the body on to the stretcher, and carry it away down the trenches. Thus he passes out of our midst and we carry on as before, but with a remembrance.

War

"The fibre of every noble life," says Ruskin, "is interwoven for ever in the work of the world."

The simple cortège wends its way down the dark road to the burial ground. Thus closes another life, given up to preserve the homesteads of England, and this the only token, a small wooden cross inscribed with the words "Erected by his Comrades." Side by side with him lie others, who have also quietly and unostentatiously laid down their lives.

When one day we took over a new piece of line, a patrol had to be sent out to inspect the wire and to try to locate a German listening post. An officer, a sergeant, and two men crept out over the parapet, with a bomb in each hand,

War

Half an hour passed by, and all was quiet, as the sentries had orders not to fire. An hour passed, and they were expected back soon. An hour and a half, two hours, and still the patrol remained out in No-man's-land. Four hours passed, and we sent out a search party. The search party returned and asked if the patrol had come in. No, they had not; and the night began to grow light and the sun rose, but nothing was heard of the patrol, nor did we ever have any news of them. They went out, but did not return.

In England a widowed mother had news that her only son was missing. Week after week she lives in hopes, hoping, praying, and still no news. Perhaps the young officer is still lying be-

War

tween the lines, and his regiment has moved elsewhere. Wherever they may move they leave their sad imprint behind them in the rude wooden crosses and the grass-covered mounds.

Months ago now the great battle of Loos was raging and we were marching up to take our part. As we marched from Bethune up the wide road, which was packed with transport, ambulances and cavalry, a long stream of wounded were moving painfully down the road, leaving the battle. They plodded bravely along, some with large red-stained bandages over their heads, others with bleeding legs, shattered arms, or fractured bones. Some would collapse exhausted by the side of the road, urged in vain by their comrades to keep mov-

War

ing. This ghastly procession appeared to be never-ending. As we passed a dressing-station a man was being brought in on a stretcher, suffering from gas, struggling so violently to get air into his poisoned lungs that the bearers could scarcely manage to keep him on the stretcher. Up the road we marched in column of route, a battalion a thousand strong, and were merged into the battle and eaten up by it. After three days we too were on the return journey, having lost many of our own comrades, some of them left on the battle-field, some gassed, others broken in limb or mind by the inferno of shell-fire.

Desolate villages, ruined homes, the ghostly echo of treading feet and the

War

rattle of transport past the gaunt remnants of houses, and a pervading bleakness and depressing solitude.

That is war.



XI. Aunts and Ants

MANY devices have been made and patented to enable us to cook in the trenches—Tommy's Cookers, Little Kitcheners and Primus stoves, but all these appeared irrelevant to the old lady who said "If you have a fire-step, why not use that?"

Talking about an old lady reminds me of a present Greg received. There arrived for him by post a large parcel half an hour before we were due to move up to the trenches. Heavy parcels invariably arrive then; but Greg, being

Aunts and Ants

strong in limb, decided to carry it up with him, as it looked like food. We arrived at the trenches weary and wet, and after things had settled down Greg detailed a party to draw five hundred sandbags from the Engineers' dump. The party returned after some time, and for two solid hours we repaired a breach in the parapet, filling sandbags, tying them up, carrying them, laying them.

When we knocked off, Greg said to me, "I'll see what there is in this parcel; I hope something good. He cut the string and undid the brown paper, discovering seventeen neatly rolled sandbags and a short note:

"DEAR ARTHUR,

"I hope you will find these

Aunts and Ants

sandbags useful. If not, you can give them to your men.

"Your affectionate

"AUNT DOROTHY."

"Well," said Greg, "to-morrow I must indent for five hundred less seventeen."

As a matter of a fact they now form a part of the long line of sandbags that separates us from the Hun, which is the aim and object of most sandbags. In this sandbag world in which we are at present existing, one has but to look back over a low part of the parados in the day-time and the scene is one of solitude and sandbags. Here the front line curves round to the right and disappears into a dip, emerging again on the slope of a ridge about a mile away. Behind that

Aunts and Ants

are irregular lines leading back to more rows of sandbags in the supports. A strip of country intersected with sandbags and not a soul to be seen, yet in this apparently desolate spot are men swarming like ants in their underground burrows. As soon as the sun disappears in the west and night comes on, they leave their burrows and the same strip of country is alive with men. Then the next day dawns. All have disappeared into the ground.

And so it goes on day after day, night after night, wet feet, cold feet, snow and rain, Sundays and Saints' days. At one time we are trudging up to the trenches, at another back to rest camp.

A long stretch of flat country ; straight ahead a forest of regularly set hop-poles ;

Aunts and Ants

in the distance to the right more hop-poles and large open fields, with here and there an isolated cottage or a group of farm buildings ; on the horizon, surmounted by a windmill, a low hill, from the foot of which leads a long symmetrical avenue of trees, marking a main road.

To the left a similar view—stretches of plough-land ; small somnolent villages scattered about at random on these bleak and dreary plains.

That is Flanders as we know it.



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